

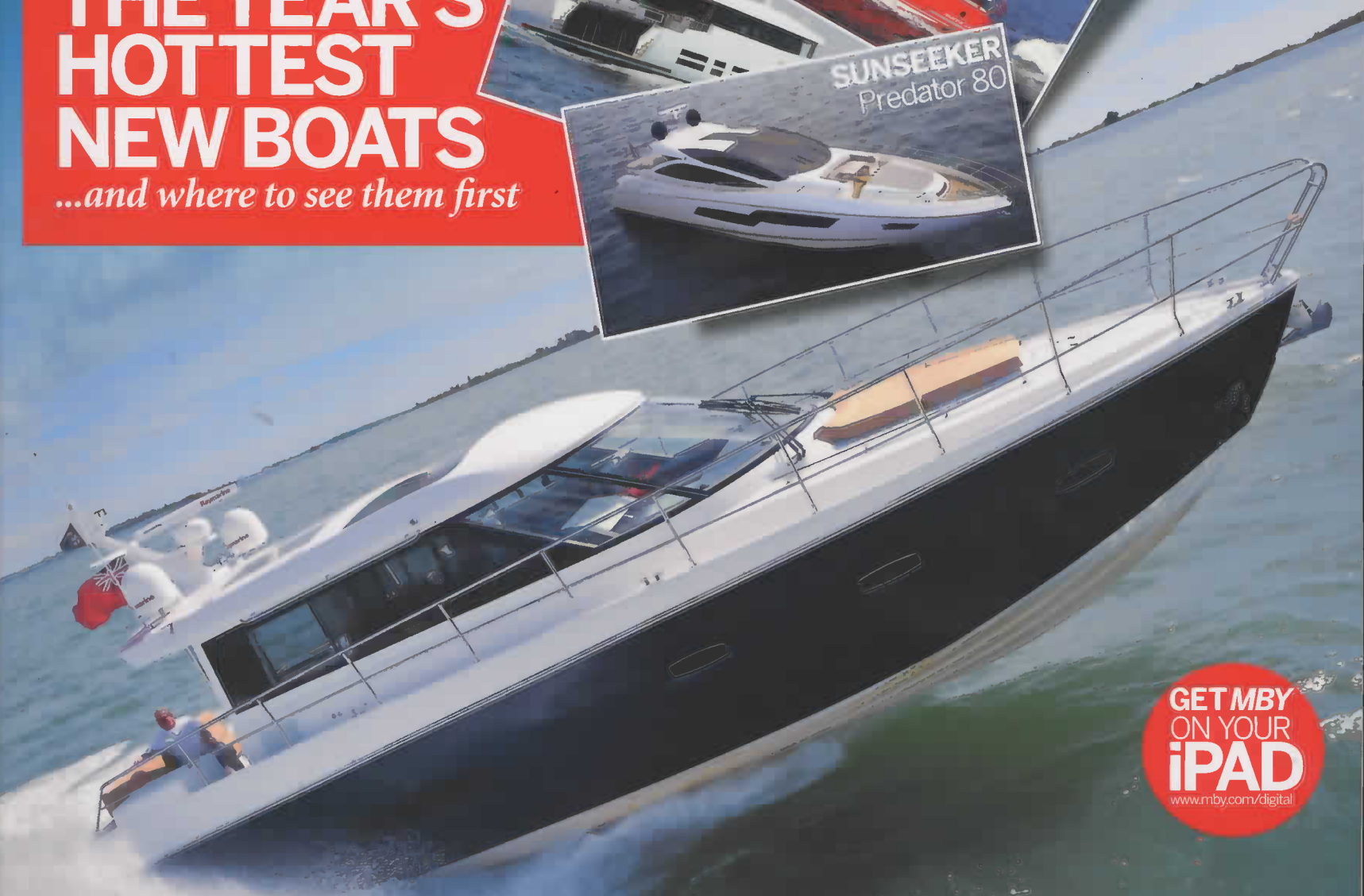
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MOTOR BOAT & YACHTING

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The full Monte

Montenegro's magical coastline and fervent winds lie in wait for our travellers

by photos: Fiona Walker

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CAST & CREW



THE ADVENTURE

Fiona Walker, a former journalist with the BBC, and her husband Frank, who retired as Chief Minister of Jersey in 2009, are spending their third summer on board their Azimut 62, *Zaffina*. This year the couple are cruising around southern Italy and onto Montenegro and Croatia.

THE ROUTE

From Sicily, along the sole of Italy and across the Adriatic to the Gulf of Kotor in Montenegro.

HIGHLIGHT OF THIS LEG

Discovering the picturesque villages in the Gulf of Kotor.

Our arrival back in Sicily coincided with a superb forecast, so we put to sea as soon as we had provisioned and fuelled up. Our next

leg would take us around the boot of Italy and on to Montenegro. Since we embarked on our voyage three years ago, the price of diesel has soared and now, whenever we fill the tanks, we hand over the credit card with a gulp of horror. Fortunately the euro has moved in our favour more recently and the pumps are kinder to us this time around.

Our course took us across the Strait of Messina to mainland Italy and we soon felt that familiar tingle of excitement at the prospect of exploring new territory. Sicily faded as the toe of Europe came into sharp focus and it was an enjoyable if unremarkable crossing to the small port of

Roccella Ionica, where there were no facilities other than a place to tie up. This proved slightly problematic when we discovered that our generator refused to work. No worries – we had plenty of cold food in the fridge and after dining in the cockpit we headed to a nearby restaurant for dessert and coffee. I wished we'd eaten there – the pizzas were rectangular, sold by the metre and looked delicious. We were charged nothing for our berth, although the port official warned us that the police may appear at some point and ask for €20 in tax – luckily for us, they didn't!

THE HEEL OF ITALY

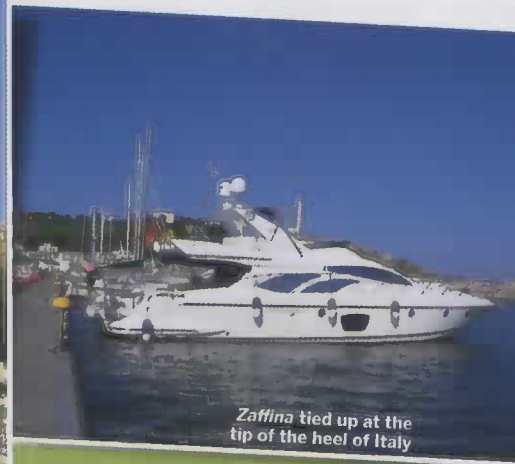
We were away by 8am the following morning. Conditions were pretty good once the short, punchy Mediterranean swell had smoothed out and at 25 knots, *Zaffina* skimmed across the calm water creating the tiniest wake. Our destination





The dilapidated granddaddy of the Mussolini staircase

Santa Maria di Leuca's historic staircases



Zaffina tied up at the tip of the heel of Italy



We could happily have lingered in Santa Maria but the wind was changing



The Church of Our Lady of the Rock sits on an island in the Bay of Kotor

was Santa Maria di Leuca at the tip of the heel of Italy. Here, we'd been told Mussolini inaugurated a giant stone staircase from the basilica to the aqueduct as a ceremonial entrance to Italy. Approaching the harbour, we could see the dramatic flight of steps leading from shore to cliff top. It was early afternoon when we arrived and too hot to do much more than tie up and attend to formalities but later we ventured out and headed towards what we realised were in fact two giant stone staircases. They originally had an enormous water feature separating them and it didn't take much to imagine how awe-inspiring this stairway must have been decades earlier.

We could happily have lingered longer in Santa Maria – the small port has a classic holiday vibe and a good choice of restaurants – but the forecast dictated otherwise. The following day promised a Force 5 from the south, but if we waited

around the wind would turn north for several days, and would be on the nose all the way across the Adriatic. We were up at 5am the following morning and on our way as the sun was rising, only for it to disappear behind dark clouds.

F7ORDING AHEAD

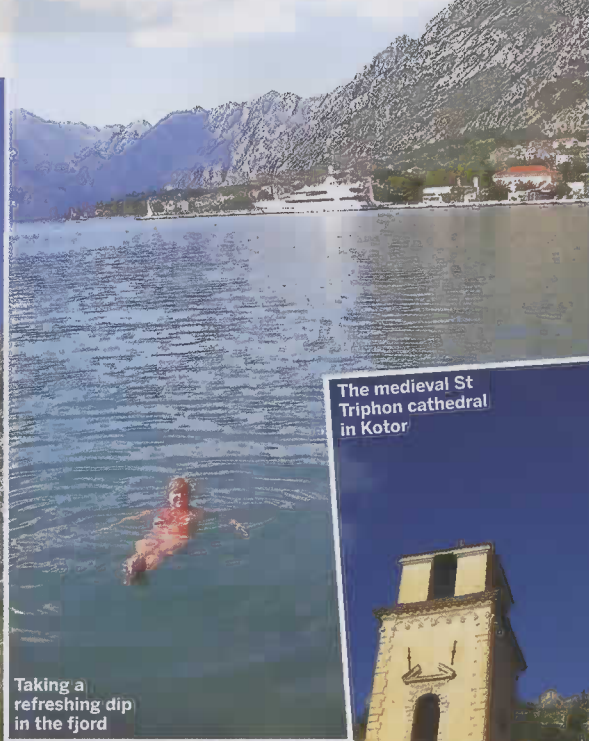
The crossing was long, lonely and lumpy – the Force 5 was a conservative forecast but at least the wind was behind us. *Zaffina* carved up the miles with her usual aplomb and kept us relatively comfortable, but it was still a huge relief when Montenegro eventually appeared on the horizon. Our final 12 miles were directly across the wind, unfortunately, and one last triumphant wave gave us a complete dousing about two miles out.

So here we are, shattered and dripping wet, but past caring; we can see our destination and know that we will soon be sheltered from the wind.

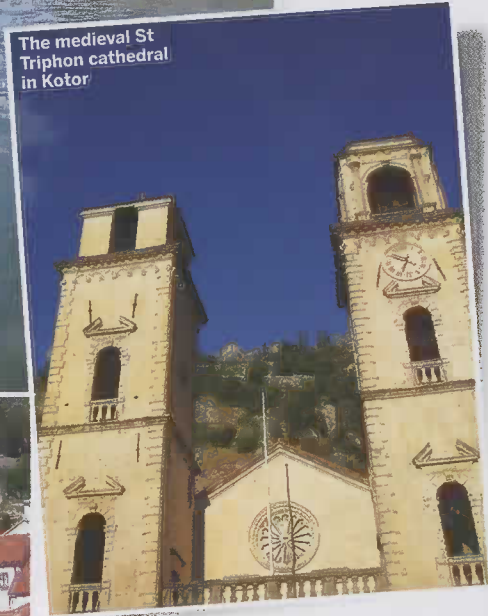
Our jaws drop in wonder – nothing has truly prepared us for this spectacular landscape



Breathtaking mountains loom over the Bay of Kotor



Taking a refreshing dip in the fjord



The medieval St Triphon cathedral in Kotor

recognition overnight and the water is now a mass of white caps.

BEWARE THE BORA

Two hours later there is no improvement and we seek a more sheltered spot. We have heard about the *bora* wind, but we hadn't expected to experience it quite so soon. This local wind pours down from the hilltops and swirls around the fjord in a mass of different directions. We head to what should be a sheltered position on the opposite side of the bay. It isn't! Previously the wind was from the south-west, now it is from the north and our anemometer is showing gusts of 40 knots. We venture to the far end of the fjord in search of a better position and in the furthest corner we finally find a spot where the water is shallow enough to anchor and the wind less blustery. Crossing our fingers, we drop the hook again.

Our morning remains calm and we breakfast on board but by mid-afternoon the wind has turned again and we get another

We motor between the headlands, slowing our speed to cruise sedately while our jaws drop in wonder. We have seen pictures of Montenegro, but nothing has truly prepared us for this spectacular landscape. Wonderful speckled green mountains loom on the mainland while calm clear water extends like a deep blue-green blanket ahead of us.

Our destination is Porto Montenegro and our arrival, after eight hours at sea, is mercifully easy. The new marina has first-class facilities and berths are not the cheapest but with good restaurants on site and some chic boutiques it is the perfect spot to relax for a while. The icing on the cake is to discover that diesel is just 70 cents a litre!

Having completed what promises to be our longest sea trip of the season, we spend a few days in port, trying to sort out the generator. It transpires – after several engineers have poked and prodded it – that the battery needs replacing, a simple enough task and one that seems to do the trick. Now we can finally enjoy a night at anchor – my



Sealife

The waters of Montenegro are rich with sealife and on a good day you can spot dolphins, catfish, marlin, swordfish and tuna

favourite way of spending a warm, balmy evening on our Azimut.

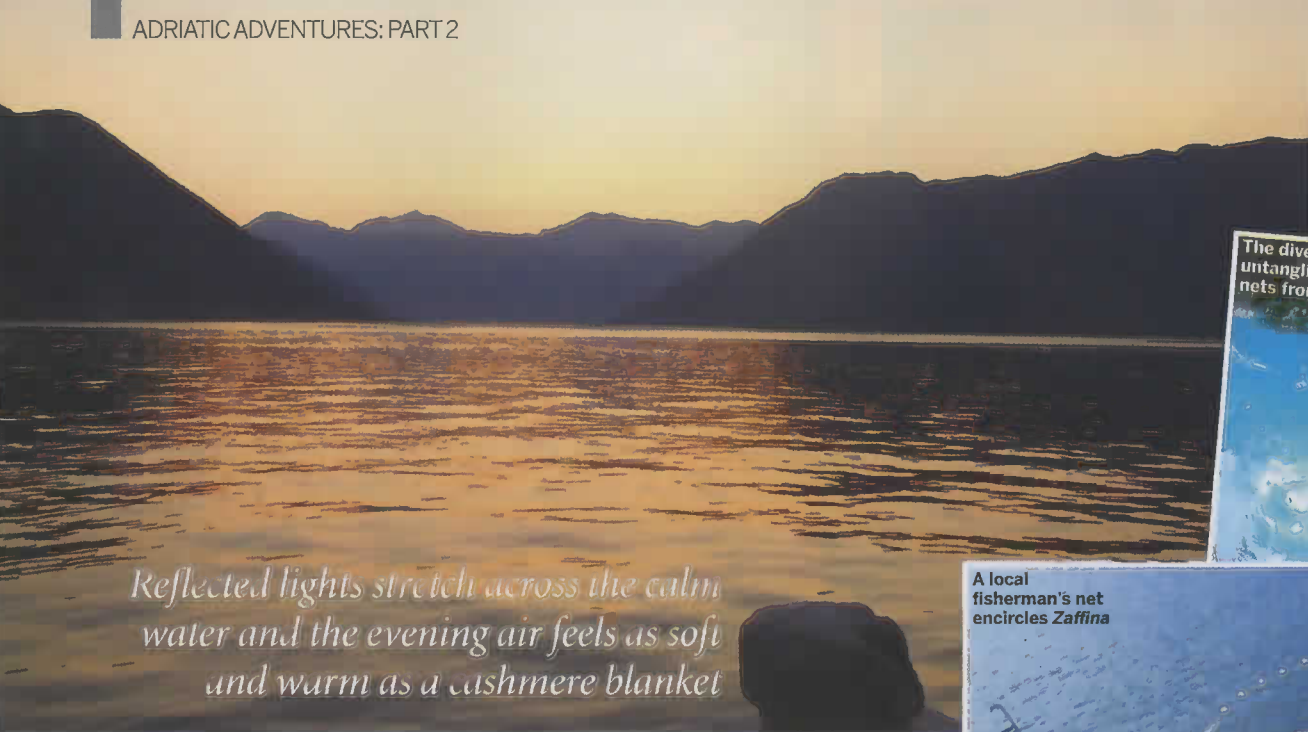
KOTOR'S CALM WATERS

One of the biggest attractions of Montenegro is the Boka Kotorska, or the Gulf of Kotor, an inland sea reminiscent of the Morbihan in southern Brittany. It is surrounded by towering volcanic mountains and the shoreline is dotted with picturesque towns and villages. Traditional terracotta rooftops cascade brightly down through the green ribbons of trees.

We choose our spot and settle down for our first night at anchor this season. It is everything we dreamed of through the long winter months; the water here is so still that reflected lights stretch across its motionless surface and the evening air feels as soft and warm as a cashmere blanket. It is almost impossible to imagine conditions here being anything less than perfect, so it is a rude shock to be woken at 5am to the incessant hammering of angry waves against the hull. Things have changed almost beyond

St George island has a prime spot in the Bay of Kotor





Reflected lights stretch across the calm water and the evening air feels as soft and warm as a cashmere blanket

buffeting. Up comes the anchor and off we go to the small port of Kotor where we are told there's space on the quay. Each time Frank positions *Zaffina* to back into the allocated berth, the wind swoops down and pushes her out of line, and it isn't until the third attempt that we finally get into our designated place and we can relax again.

Kotor has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the recognition is well deserved. The walled town is the oldest in the country; narrow alleyways link dozens of tiny, shadowy squares. Green shutters hang at every window and wrought iron balconies and barely glimpsed roof terraces are cluttered with colourful plants. Perched on the nearby hillside is an ancient castle, the perfect lookout to spot invaders heading for the port far below.

By the main square there are shops and restaurants, but our favourite spot is the open-air bar in the ramparts above the street level. At night the ancient castle is lit up and looks utterly spellbinding. Taxis are incredibly cheap in Kotor and we take a €4 ride out of town towards Dobrota, where the small bay-side villages are even more picturesque and well worth exploring.

FISHING FOR PROBLEMS

The following night we anchor again in the fjord. Although we're apprehensive about the wind, it is a glorious evening and better still, a peaceful night. In the morning we watch with fascination as a small fishing boat approaches and lays a net nearby. But it's a bit too near – a sudden gust of wind erupts from nowhere and our *Azimut* is pushed directly over the net. The fisherman shouts at us in Montenegrin, clearly blaming us for the fact that his floats are now surrounding our boat. He tries to release the net but it is impossible because it has now twisted around our prop and he just makes it tighter.

Frank and I dive under the stern to try to undo it, but it is tightly wound and our efforts are unsuccessful. Other fishermen have come to join the action. One of them



Churches

A Catholic country, Montenegro is littered with churches and cathedrals. The St Tripion cathedral, above, dates from 1166

speaks good English and suggests we call a diver. Half an hour later the diver is ferried out to *Zaffina*, ready for action. The drama is over within minutes but we are annoyed to be presented

with a large bill and told that, if we don't pay it, they will call the police! Eventually we agree to contribute half of the sum, despite having made absolutely no contribution to the entanglement, other than being at anchor nearby when the net was laid.

The whole episode leaves a nasty taste, especially when other boat owners in Montenegro question whether it was a scam; it certainly didn't appear that way at the

time, but perhaps we are gullible. Whatever the truth, we are determined not to let the episode spoil the rest of our holiday, and with visitors due to arrive shortly, we turn our attention to getting the boat shipshape.

We've had two weeks of unbroken sunshine now, but as our friends fly in, grey clouds gather overhead and we wonder what lies in store as we thread our way to the wonderful islands off Croatia. **MBY**

The diver at work untangling the nets from our prop



A local fisherman's net encircles *Zaffina*



The chic new marina at Porto Montenegro

